

To Mr. Hodson.

A token of affection & respect
for the many favors done the Author.

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT

PENTONVILLE CHAPEL,

NEAR ISLINGTON,

On SUNDAY, JUNE 21st, 1789.

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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

PENTON CHAPEL



On Sunday June 21st 1789

*St. Paul's Parting Appeal to the Church at Ephesus
considered,*

I N

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Preached on SUNDAY, JUNE 21st, 1789,

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PENTONVILLE CHAPEL,

NEAR ISLINGTON.

BY J. A. K N I G H T. *K*

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

WHETHER IT BE RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD TO HEARKEN
UNTO YOU MORE THAN UNTO GOD, JUDGE YE. *Acts, iv. 19.*

WO IS UNTO ME IF I PREACH NOT THE GOSPEL. *1 Cor. ix. 16.*

L O N D O N:

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M.DCC.LXXXIX.

St Paul's Church, York, in the Church of England

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday, the 10th of June 1783

BY THE REV. JOHN RENTONVILLE, CHAPLAIN



BY J. A. L. I. O. H. T.

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W. B. L. G. R. S. T.

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THE candid reader of the following pages will please to observe, they are not obtruded upon the public from a presumption that they contain any thing particularly new or striking: the author has only to plead the importunity of friends, and in compliance therewith, an humble wish to leave with them a brief summary of those truths, which, under God, it was his earnest desire to enforce upon the congregation to whom this discourse was delivered from the pulpit.

J. A. K.

*Henry Street, Pentonville,
July 1, 1789.*

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THE candid reader of the following pages will please to observe, they are not intended upon the public from a presumption that they contain any thing particularly new or striking: the author has only to plead the importance of friends, and in compliance therewith, an humble wish to leave with them a brief summary of those truths, which, under God, it was his earnest desire to enforce upon the congregation to whom this discourse was delivered from the pulpit.

J. A. W.

Nov 2nd 1840
Nov 11 1840

A

S E R M O N, &c.

ACTS, xx. 26, 27.

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.—For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

THE chapter from which our text is selected, is one of those affecting passages of scripture which it is hardly possible for a feeling mind to read without peculiar emotions of tenderness. It describes the last affectionate parting of St. Paul from the church at Ephesus, which he had been the honoured instrument, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, of planting and building up in the truth, as it is in Jesus. The apostle was now on his way to Jerusalem: and being assured, by a special revelation from the Lord, that he should no more visit those parts, he sent from Miletus for the Elders of the church; and having first reminded

B

them

them of the divine goodness, in the conversion of their souls, through his instrumentality; and in what manner he had watched over them for the space of three years, with many tears and temptations; he appeals to their consciences, in the sight of God, that he had laboured with his hands, because he would not be chargeable to any of them, having coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel;—and, in the words which have just been read, solemnly declares himself pure from the blood of all men, having not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God.

The circumstances under which I stand before you this day, which is the closing sabbath of my short, but, I trust, sincere labours among you in the gospel, naturally lead me to the choice of this subject, as being particularly calculated to call your remembrance to those precious truths which it has been the desire of my heart to impress upon you, and as it gives me an opportunity of urging their importance once more on your souls.—Allow me, therefore, in discoursing from the words of the text,

First, to engage your attention to a general view of those important doctrines
which

which were the subjects of the apostle's ministrations, and are necessarily included in a declaration of the whole counsel of God :

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew the guilt and danger which those entail upon themselves, who, under a profession of the ministerial character, either from a slavish fear of men, or a sordid desire of their favours, keep from them those truths which concern their everlasting peace :—And then,

Thirdly, point you to some particular periods, in which it will afford a faithful minister unspeakable comfort, and thankfulness, that he has been enabled so to assert the truths of God, as to stand acquitted, in his sight, of the blood of all men.

First, wherever the divine providence called the apostle to preach the gospel of salvation, the consistency of his doctrines, and the simplicity of his heart in dispensing them, were uniformly and beautifully apparent.—Whether we hear him addressing a king upon his judgment seat, or a trembling persecutor in a dungeon, his determination was to debase the pride of man, that the Lord alone might be exalted as the alpha and omega in his salvation; and to that end he was careful,

1. To lay the axe to the root of human boasting; by asserting, in the most positive and striking terms, the universal apostacy and awful depravity of mankind, through the transgression of the first Adam, whose crime, as the federal head of his posterity, involved them all in the dreadful consequences of his disobedience.—Hence, when writing to the church at Rome, he proves, that “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon *all men*, for that *all* have sinned*.” Nor is it possible for language to be more expressive of the misery to which sin has reduced our wretched race, than that which he adopts in his epistle to the Ephesians, wherein we are represented as being by nature dead in trespasses and sins—children of wrath—aliens and strangers to the Lord—without hope, and without God in the world.—Such were the apostle’s views of the ruined and degenerate

* Rom. v. 12.—Those who contend for what they are pleased to term the dignity of human nature, have frequently taken upon them to aver that man inherently possesses such a spark, at least, of his original rectitude, as will, if improved, lead him back to God. When such persons are able to demonstrate what intermediate state there can possibly be between absolute death and spiritual life, their self-contradictory position will be entitled to some regard.

state

state of man: but, alas! how widely do they differ from him, who, though they bear the name of christian ministers, instead of falling under a conviction of this truth, and shewing their hearers what they are by nature; as creatures totally fallen from God, stripped of his image, and under the dreadful curse of his righteous law; as sinners, extol and magnify their imaginary virtue, wisdom, and rectitude!—Compare their swelling words with the humbling truths which Paul taught, and then say, whether the tendency of such erroneous doctrines is not awfully dangerous; and, if grace prevent not, will prove eternally destructive to the souls of men.

The apostle having, in order to his humiliation, pointed out to the poor transgressor the misery to which sin had reduced him, proceeded,

2. To the theme which evidently touched the master string in his soul; namely, “Redemption in the blood of Christ, by the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” To display the treasures of that grace, and the nature, extent, and influence of that salvation, was the joy of his soul. Unlike those vain pretenders to interest in

this blessing, who, while they boast their superior light, and promise liberty to others, are themselves, it is to be feared, the slaves of sin; this humble and exemplary servant of Jesus rejoiced in his salvation, as including in it a deliverance from the guilt of sin, by the blood of the Lamb; and from its dominion, by the power of divine grace, as well as an exemption from that eternal wrath to which it had exposed him; and therefore,

3. Enforced the indispensable necessity of regeneration by the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit, through whose divine agency the souls of the redeemed are enlightened to behold the glory of God, as it shines in the face of Christ—blest with repentance unto life—united to Jesus by faith, as their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—and guided in the ways of holiness and peace*.—So essential did the apostle consider this divine change to the salvation of the soul, that he declares, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ (whatever his pretensions may be, and however highly exalted he may appear in his own eyes, or

* Rom. viii. 11. 14. 1 Cor. ii. 10. Gal. iii. 16. 18. Eph. iii. 16. and 1 Cor. i. 30.

in the eyes of others), he is none of his:” for, if a man be really interested in Christ by faith, “ he is a new creature: old things are passed away, and all things are become new *.” Say then, my friends—Is this your state before God? Are you passed from death unto life? Do you know any thing of this inestimable blessing by experience? Have you been brought out of the bondage of sin and Satan into the glorious liberty of the sons of God?—I entreat you, as a friend to your souls, carefully to consider upon what foundation you build for eternity. “ Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith—prove yourselves—Know ye not your own-selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates †?” Again,

4. As the apostle directed the guilty sinner to the atonement of Jesus, as his only plea for pardon and peace with God; so he determined to exalt the spotless righteousness of the divine surety as the sole ground of his justification from the curse of the violated law ‡. It is true, there was a period, in the days of his ignorance and unbelief,

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

‡ Rom iv. 5. 15. and 2 Cor, v, 21.

when he was, in his own apprehension, alive without the law; but when the commandment came, with the light and demonstration of the Holy Spirit, attended with a deep conviction of its awful strictness, spirituality, and extent, sin revived, and he died (*i. e.* all hope of justification, by his own imperfect obedience to the righteous demands of the law, failed him); and from that memorable period the prevailing desire of his heart was, that in all his approaches to the throne of grace, at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, he might be accepted in the righteousness of his God and Saviour. Here it was he found safe anchorage in all the storms of life. This was all his boast in the hour of dissolution, and in this he will glory through an endless eternity. But so far was he from making the doctrine of justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ, a cloak for licentious purposes, that, on the contrary, his own conduct and practice exemplified,

5. The holy tendency of the doctrines of grace, when implanted in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. And, indeed, the holiness of the divine character shines in all the dispensations of our God, no less conspicuously

spicuously in the gift of his beloved Son, to harmonize the divine perfections in the salvation of man, than in the awful majesty with which he appeared to the trembling Israelites, when he gave them his holy law from Mount Sinai, by the disposition of angels. Nor is it possible that an unsanctified soul can appear with acceptance before him; "for without holiness (imparted to, and stamped upon the soul) no man shall see the Lord*." This is the grand end of the christian's vocation; for "God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love†." And that which makes the heavenly state desirable to the new-born soul is, that in the world of light he will enjoy the unclouded vision of the Triune Jehovah, in all the glory of his unsullied holiness, to his eternal and unutterable joy‡. Influenced and animated by an hope so full of immortality, Paul was enabled to "purify himself as God is pure;" and, wherever he came, to maintain "a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man§."

* Heb. xii. 14. † Eph. i. 4. ‡ Psalm xvii. 15.
and 1 John iii. 2. § Acts xxiv. 16. and 1 John iii. 3.

Blameless,

Blameless, however, as his conduct was among men, it did not exempt him from the painful experience, that in every city bonds and afflictions awaited him;—and from an heartfelt conviction, “that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” He taught,

6. The necessity of taking up the cross daily, and following our divine Saviour in the regeneration; “for the disciple is not above his master, nor is the servant greater than his lord.” And as our blessed Redeemer, “that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate; so it is no less the believer’s privilege than his duty, to go forth unto him without the camp, bearing reproach for his sake;*” looking unto Jesus as the blessed object of his hope, and living by faith upon the fulness which is treasured up in him, until the work of grace be consummated in glory, and free, unmerited, everlasting love shall be the theme of the whole glorified church, for ever and ever. Which leads me to observe,

7. That a firm reliance on the faithfulness of his God, in completing the work which

* Heb. xiii. 12, 13.

his divine Spirit had begun in him, was the ground of his joy, and the boast of his tongue. Wherefore, when addressing the church at Philippi, he declares himself confident of this very thing—that he who had begun a good work in them, would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*. And in his epistle to the church at Rome, he expresses the same unshaken confidence, in these still more emphatical words: “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord †.” Nor did this assurance of the divine favour to his soul fail the apostle in that hour when all other objects will prove miserable comforters, as is evident from his own declaration to Timothy in the prospect of his departure—“I know whom I have believed (saith this triumphant saint), and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day ‡.” Permit me, however, to

* Phil. i. 6.

† Rom. viii. 38, 39.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 12.

remind you, that the perseverance for which St. Paul contended, most essentially differs from those unscriptural and antinomian notions respecting it, which have no other tendency than to encourage the barren professor in his idle and unfruitful dream; for the very manner in which he enforced that blessed doctrine, shews that he considered it as a gradual progression, and an actual increase in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, in order to animate the believer in this glorious exercise, the apostle sets before him the eagerness of a racer*, the exertions of a wrestler†, and the active courage of a soldier fighting under a captain whom he loves‡, as examples for his imitation, in the service, and for the glory, of that divine Saviour, to whom *alone* he is indebted for every victory, and for all the blessings which he enjoys in time, and to eternity. To this important truth Paul sets his seal in these expressive words to his son Timothy—"I have fought a good fight—I have finished my course—I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up

* Phil. iii. 14, 15. † 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall *give me* in that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing *.” Having thus considered the former part of our subject, we proceed,

Secondly, To shew the guilt and danger which those entail upon themselves, who, under a profession of the ministerial character, either from a slavish fear of men, or a sordid desire of their favours, keep back those truths which concern their everlasting peace. And,

1. To withhold any part of revealed truth, is to offer the highest insult both to the wisdom and authority of its divine author.— Were the ambassador of an earthly prince, when charged with affairs of the greatest importance to the honour of his sovereign, and his country, basely to betray the trust which had been reposed in him, and meanly elinquish the cause which it was his duty (if called to it) to defend with his blood; must not every faithful subject judge him worthy of death? And if in such a case he would be justly marked with detestation and contempt, of how much sorer punishment is that man

* 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

worthy,

worthy, who tamely gives up the cause of truth, and, like Balaam, sacrifices his conscience for those wages of iniquity, which, as they come with the curse of the Almighty, will most assuredly perish with the using, Farther,

2. The meanness of such a character is as contemptible as his cause is wretched. To fear the majesty of heaven, is so far from being a disgrace to the most exalted of his creatures, that it is their highest privilege and honour: but, from a slavish fear of man, to handle the word of God deceitfully, is not only the most despicable species of cowardice, but is also totally repugnant to the divine injunction to Jeremiah, and, in him, to every preacher to the end of time, “Gird up thy loins and speak unto them *all that I command thee*: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them *.” Nor is that man worthy the name of a christian minister, who is not habitually disposed to make this appeal to his divine master:

“Hast thou a lamb within thy fold

I would disdain to feed?

Hast thou a foe before whose face

I fear thy cause to plead †?”

3. The

* Jer. i. 17.

† How beautifully expressive of that ardent desire which every

3. The man who dares to trifle and prevaricate in the dispensation of divine truth, at the same time that he destroys the souls of others, brings certain and eternal destruction upon his own. What an awful solemnity is there in the charge of Jehovah to his

every faithful minister of Jesus feels to be useful to his fellow-creatures, are the following lines in the late Rev. Mr. Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs*—"Let the poor as they pass by my grave, point at the little spot, and thankfully acknowledge—"There lies the man, whose unwearied kindness was the constant relief of my various distresses; who tenderly visited my languishing bed, and readily supplied my indigent circumstances. How often were his counsels a guide to my perplexed thoughts, and a cordial to my dejected spirit! It is owing to God's blessing on his seasonable charities, and prudent consolations, that I now live, and live in comfort." Let a person once ignorant and ungodly, lift up his eyes to heaven, and say within himself as he walks over my bones—"Here are the last remains of that sincere friend, who watched for my soul. I can never forget with what heedless gaiety I was posting on in the paths of perdition; and I tremble to think into what irretrievable ruin I might quickly have been plunged, had not his faithful admonitions arrested me in the wild career. I was unacquainted with the gospel of peace, and had no concern for its unsearchable treasures; but now, enlightened by his instructive conversation, I see the all-sufficiency of my Saviour; and, animated by his repeated exhortations, I count all things but loss that I may win Christ. Methinks his discourses, seasoned with religion, and sent home by the divine Spirit, still tingle in my ears; are still warm on my heart; and, I trust, will be more and more operative, till we meet each other in the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

servant

servant Ezekiel!—"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning *from me*. When I say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, *but his blood will I require at thine hand* *. Compare with this striking passage the testimony of our divine Redeemer: "Who-soever shall be ashamed of *me*, and of my *words*, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels †. And then say, whether after such a declaration it is not unnecessary to offer an apology for speaking the word of life with all possible faithfulness and boldness. It is true, the conscientious discharge of this important duty will expose a minister to the sneer of the infidel, and the contempt of the ignorant; but he will find a present support in the divine blessing on his soul; and the gracious approbation of his master, at last, will amply com-

* Ezekiel iii. 17, 18.

† Mark viii. 38.

penfate for all his trials in the path of duty.—We are now,

Thirdly, to confider fome particular periods, in which it will afford a faithful minifter unſpeakable thankfulnefs and comfort that he has been enabled ſo to aſſert the truths of God, as to ſtand acquitted in his fight, of the blood of all men. And among others which might be mentioned, is,

1. The day of ſeparation from thoſe among whom he has been called to labour.—In a world like the preſent, which is ſubject to perpetual viciffitudes and changes, the providences which lead the Lord's miniſters to particular churches, and, when his wiſe and righteous ends therein are answered, removes them to other parts of his vineyard, are various and diverſified. With reſpect to that which brought me to this place, you my brethren are witneſs, it was on my part unexpected and unfought, and on yours (ſo far at leaſt as appearances could determine) entirely free and unanimous. Thus circumſtanced, there was room to expect proſperity and ſucceſs: but it was not long before experience convinced me that the truths which you heard gave offence;

fence ; and I am now constrained to withdraw myself from you, not on the ground of personal prejudice against any individual, but because the poor, to whom the gospel ought to be preached freely, must not be accommodated here, unless they can pay for admission. Upon this subject I forbear to dwell, and will close my labours in this place with entreating the Lord to pardon their unworthiness, and with praising his holy name for any reason to hope that they have not been altogether in vain. May he graciously keep those of you steadfast in his truth, upon whose hearts the light of his Holy Spirit hath arisen ; and may your future path grow brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. Be diligent in the use of those means which God hath appointed for your furtherance and growth in grace, and he will direct your steps, and bless your souls.—To many of you, from whom I have received marks of personal kindness, my grateful acknowledgments are due : and my humble prayer to the Father of Mercies for you is, That he may be the strength of your hearts, and your portion for ever.—An higher wish than this my heart cannot breathe

breathe for my dearest friend; and less than this (with submission to the divine will) I do not desire that my worst enemy should receive from him. When we are separated from each other, and when prejudices against the truths which have been preached among you have subsided—in the cooler moments of reflection, or in the solemn hour of death, you may perhaps think seriously and impartially upon what you have heard, and derive comfort from it*.—More averse to the doctrines of grace you cannot be than I once was, but, through rich abounding mercy they are now the joy of my heart, and, the Lord helping me, shall be my theme while I have a tongue to speak; and from their application to my soul by the Holy Spirit, it is, that I trust to receive support and consolation,

* “ Search and read (saith a valuable minister in his Vindication of Truth) if the scripture does not speak to all mankind as in a state of condemnation; if it affords us any hope of deliverance but for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; if it intimates any method of being saved through him, but by a faith wrought by the operation of God, and evidenced by a temper of love, and a habit of cheerful obedience to his precepts. If these points, which comprize the general scope of my preaching, are contained, and taught in the Bible, they ought not to be spoken against.”

2. In

2. In that hour when a period will be put to my mortal life; a season in which, unsustained by them, my heart and flesh must fail—Then what can the hire of unrighteousness do for a faithless minister, but plant a thousand daggers in his heart, and make a dying bed thorny and intolerable? If in that tremendous hour, the curse of God hung over his guilty head, and nothing but a fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation from the Lord, overwhelmed his trembling heart; judge you, whether the whole world, procured at the expence of our Maker's frown, would not be obtained at too dear a price!—Happy, thrice happy is he, who obtains mercy to be faithful: oppressed and opposed he may be, but never, never, shall he be overthrown—the blessed object of his hope will not forsake him in life—in death he will be his comforter—and after death his exceeding great reward.—Let us now conclude our meditations upon this subject, with,

3. Looking forward to that important and decisive day, when we shall all meet again. I mean the secret, but certain period, when the judge shall descend from heaven, with the shout of the archangel, and

and the trump of God.—Then shall the secrets of all hearts, and the remotest principle of all our actions, be unveiled before an assembled world; and the Lord will make an equitable and eternal difference “between him that serveth him, and him that serveth him not*.”—How happy will the ministers of Jesus then be, to meet those at his right hand, who have been given them as the seals of their ministry, and the living witnesses that they have not laboured in vain in the Lord. And I would fain indulge an humble hope, that some who are now here, will have to bless the friend of sinners, that ever they heard the gospel within these walls.—But have not some of you reason to fear, that the sermons which you have heard, and the exhortations which have been given you from this pulpit, will, unless di-

* “O may I pant for thee in each desire!

“And with strong faith foment the holy fire!

“Stretch out my soul in hope, and grasp the prize,

“Which in eternity’s deep bosom lies!

“At the great day of recompence, behold,

“Devoid of fear, the fatal book unfold!

“Then wafted upward to the blissful seat,

“From age to age my grateful song repeat;

“My Light, my Life, my God, my Saviour see,

“And rival angels in the praise of thee!”

YOUNG’S Last Day.

vine

vine mercy interpose, be an awful aggravation of your misery in that day, when “the Lord shall arise to shake terribly the earth?”—Where, O where will you then fly for refuge? To call upon the rocks and mountains to hide you will be in vain, if the flighted Saviour should at last “laugh at your calamity, and mock you when your fear cometh.”—May he this day deliver you from all enmity and hardness of heart, and enable you to “seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon *.” So shall we have to congratulate each other in the world of bliss, that we have neither preached nor heard the gospel in vain. Which may he mercifully grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be glory, dominion, and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

* Isa. lv. 6. 7.

H Y M N

H Y M N

On Acts xx. 26. 27.

By the Rev. Mr. NEWTON.

I.

WHEN Paul was parted from his friends,
It was a weeping day ;
But Jesus made them all amends,
And wip'd their tears away.

II.

Ere long they met again with Joy,
(Secure no more to part)
Where praises ev'ry tongue employ,
And pleasure fills each heart.

III.

Thus all the preachers of his grace
Their children soon shall meet :
Together see their Savior's face,
And worship at his feet.

IV.

But they who heard the word in vain,
Tho' oft and plainly warn'd,
Will tremble, when they meet again
The ministers they scorn'd.

V. On

V.

On your own heads your blood will fall,
 If any perish here ;
 The preachers who have told you all,
 Will stand approv'd and clear.

VI.

Yet, Lord, to save themselves alone,
 Is not their only view !
 Oh ! hear their pray'r, thy message own,
 And save their hearers too !

THE END.

6 JUL 65

